

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

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DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 LUSAKA 1892

NOFORN EXCEPT UK, CANADA, FRG, FRANCE

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

PRETORIA FOR EMBASSY AND DAO

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4

TAGS: PDEV PEPR SF WA

SUBJ: NAMIBIA: SENIOR SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY OFFICER DISCUSSES

SAG STRATEGY, SITUATION IN NAMIBIA, AND CASSINGA RAID

1. AMBASSADOR MCHENRY, DATT COL. CREWS, AND NACH

OF AF/S HAD AN IMPROMPTU DISCUSSION ON MAY 26 AND

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AGAIN INFORMALLY ON MAY 27 WITH COL. PIETER G.

GROENEWALD, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF, SOUTH AFRICAN

AIR FORCE INTELLIGENCE. GROENEWALD WAS A CHIEF

PLANNER OF THE MAY 4 ATTACK ON THE SWAPO BASE AT

CASSINGA, ANGOLA. GROENEWALD IS WELL CONNECTED IN

SENIOR SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT, MILITARY AND

POLITICAL CIRCLES.

2. CONVERSATION CENTERED ON THE SAG'S RATIONALE FOR AND TIMING OF THE RAIDS INTO ANGOLA. GROENEWALD ASSERTED THAT PIK BOTHA WAS UNAWARE OF THE NEW YORK NEGOTIATING STRATEGY OF THE WESTERN FIVE TOWARD SWAPO AND THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE WEEK BEGINNING MAY 7 WOULD HAVE SEEN EITHER SWAPO'S ACCEPTANCE OF OUR PROPOSAL OR ITS FURTHER ISOLATION. HE SAID HE WOULD BE MEETING WITH PIK BOTHA MAY 29 TO DISCUSS WAYS OF CLOSING THE "INFORMATION GAP" WITH THE FIVE. (COMMENT: THIS IS A SURPRISING CLAIM GIVEN THE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE THAT THE FIVE WOULD BE MEETING WITH SWAPO ON MAY 8 AND OUR EFFORTS TO KEEP THE SOUTH AFRICAN UN MISSION INFORMED.)

3. WHILE NOT EXPRESSING ANY DOUBTS ABOUT THE WISDOM OF THE CASSINGA RAID, GROENEWALD INDICATED THAT THE SAG HAS GIVEN SERIOUS THOUGHT TO THE RAID'S FUTURE IMPLICATIONS. HE SAID THAT ON MAY 24 THE SAG HAD DECIDED THAT IT SHOULD VERY CAREFULLY CONSIDER FUTURE NAMIBIA-CONNECTED MILITARY OPERATIONS IN LIGHT OF THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES. HE BELIEVED THERE WOULD BE NO MORE PREEMPTIVE RAIDS AS HE SAW NO NEED. FUTURE REACTIVE ACTIONS WILL BE CAREFULLY CONSIDERED AND ARE INTENDED TO TAKE PLACE ON NAMIBIAN SOIL. GROENEWALD STATED THAT THE SAG INTENDS TO FIGHT AND NEGOTIATE SIMULTANEOUSLY.

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4. THE DECISION TO STRIKE AT SWAPO IN ANGOLA HAD BEEN MADE, GROENEWALD SAID, ON THE BASIS OF SAG KNOWLEDGE OF SWAPO PLANS AND ALSO AS A RESULT OF STEPPED UP SWAPO MILITARY ACTIVITIES INSIDE NAMIBIA. THE SAG, HE SAID, HAD IMPORTANT INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION INDICATING THAT SWAPO HAD NO INTENTION OF AGREEING TO THE FIVE'S SETTLEMENT PLAN. EMBOLDENED BY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY OF NAMIBIA (PLAN) "SUCSESSES" (SEE BELOW) IN NAMIBIA, THE MILITARY WING OF SWAPO HAD GAINED THE UPPER HAND OVER THOSE IN THE ORGANIZATION FAVORING ACCEPTANCE OF THE WESTERN PROPOSAL. NUJOMA HAD SIDED WITH THE HARDLINERS, ACCORDING TO THE SAG'S INFORMATION.

5. GROENEWALD SAID THAT THE SAG BELIEVES THAT SOVIET INFLUENCE ON NETO AND KAUNDA IS SO GREAT THAT THEY COULD NOT PRESSURE NUJOMA TO ACCEPT EVEN IF THEY WISHED TO DO SO. HE ASSERTED THAT SOVIET AMBASSADOR SOLODOVNIKOV IN LUSAKA CONTROLS BOTH NUJOMA AND KAUNDA, THE LATTER INDIRECTLY BECAUSE HE FEARS THE "SOVIET-SUPPORTED ZAPU TERRORISTS" WHO, GROENEWALD SAID, OUTNUMBER THE ZAMBIAN ARMY 2-1. GROENEWALD STATED HE WOULD TRY TO GET PERMISSION TO PROVIDE US WITH THE INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION

SUBSTANTIATING THESE CLAIMS.

6. ACCORDING TO GROENEWALD, THE PATTERN OF PLAN OPERATIONS HAS DRASTICALLY CHANGED, AND SWAPO HAS HAD SOME MILITARY "SUCCESSSES." PLAN HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN TRYING TO INFILTRATE ONLY 20 OR 30 MEN AT A TIME, BUT NOW THEY WERE ENTERING IN GROUPS OF UP TO 200 MEN AND WERE ATTEMPTING TO SET UP BASES INSIDE NAMIBIA. AT THE SAME TIME, SADF DEFENSIVE EFFORTS WERE BEING HAMPERED BY THE FEELING AMONG THE TROOPS THAT A SETTLEMENT WAS NEAR AND THAT THERE WAS NO POINT IN TAKING EXCESSIVE RISKS.

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(COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST INDICATION WE HAVE HAD

FROM SADF THAT WHAT WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY TERMED "LOW-LEVEL" GUERRILLA WARFARE IN NAMIBIA HAS ESCALATED IN SCALE. IT CONFIRMS THE SUBSTANCE OF RECENT CLAIMS BY SWEDISH JOURNALISTS THAT THEY HAD ACCOMPANIED A "POSSE" OF SEVERAL HUNDRED PLAN SOLDIERS IN NAMIBIA AND THAT PLAN WAS ATTEMPTING TO ESTABLISH BASES IN THE

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TERRITORY. THE PLAN EFFORT TO SET UP BASES TAKES ON A SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE IN LIGHT OF THE WESTERN PROPOSAL SINCE IT WOULD MEAN, IF SUCCESSFUL, THAT ARMED SWAPO TROOPS WOULD REMAIN IN NAMIBIA, MONITORED BY THE UN FORCE, DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN PERIOD, A POSSIBILITY DISTINCTLY UNINVITING TO THE SAG.)

7. ON THE CASSINGA RAID (OPERATION "REINDEER"), ABOUT WHICH GROENEWALD HAS DIRECT PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE, HE SAID THERE HAD BEEN SOME UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS. AS PART OF THE OPERATION, SADF HAD UNKNOWNLY SET UP A TEMPORARY FORWARD HELICOPTER BASE WHICH TURNED OUT TO BE ONLY TEN NAUTICAL MILES FROM A UNITA CAMP. AN EXCHANGE OF FIRE HAD BEEN NARROWLY AVERTED. (COMMENT: THE IMPLICATION IS THAT THE SAG DID NOT COORDINATE THE RAID WITH UNITA.)

8. GROENEWALD ASSERTED THAT THE HEAVY CASUALTY TOLL AT CASSINGA WAS NOT ENTIRELY THE RESULT OF THE SADF RAID. SOUTH AFRICAN FORCES HAD LEFT MORE THAN 700 DEAD. IN ADDITION, SAG NOW KNOWS THAT FOLLOWING THE WITHDRAWAL OF SOUTH AFRICAN FORCES FROM CASSINGA, THE CUBANS AT TECHAMUTET, 18 KILOMETERS AWAY, WHOSE ARMORED COLUMN THE SOUTH AFRICAN FORCE HAD DESTROYED WHEN IT HAD ATTEMPTED TO COME TO SWAPO'S RELIEF, ALSO WITHDREW FROM THE AREA SINCE THEY FEARED FACING UNITA WITHOUT ARMOR. UNITA FORCES HAD THEN MOVED IN AND, GROENEWALD SAID, HAD PROCEEDED TO "MASSACRE" SWAPO SURVIVORS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ATTACK.

9. ON PIK BOTHA'S ROLE IN THE RAID, GROENEWALD SAID THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD FULLY SUPPORTED THE ACTION, ALTHOUGH HE DENIED CLAIMS THAT BOTHA HAD BEEN IN NAMIBIA TO SEE THE TROOPS OFF. AS FOR DEFENSE MINISTER P.W. BOTHA, HE, GROENEWALD ASSERTED, HAD BEEN GIVEN A LARGE MEASURE OF

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FREEDOM IN MILITARY MATTERS SUCH AS IN DECIDING ON HOT PURSUIT OPERATIONS.

10. GROENEWALD SAID THE SADF FULLY EXPECTS A POST-CASSINGA ESCALATION IN THE SOPHISTICATION OF VIOLENCE, INCLUDING SWAPO'S EVENTUAL ACQUISITION OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS, AND IS PREPARED TO MEET THE CHALLENGE.

11. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH GROENEWALD PROVIDED A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF USEFUL INFORMATION ON SAG STRATEGY, THE CASSINGA RAID, AND THE STEP-UP IN PLAN ACTIVITIES, OTHER THAN TO CLAIM AUTHORITATIVELY THAT PIK BOTHA HAD BEEN UNAWARE OF WESTERN PLANS FOR DEALING WITH SWAPO IN NEW YORK HE PUT FORWARD NO EXPLANATION FOR THE PRECISE TIMING OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ATTACK. THE ATTACK WAS PLANNED AS EARLY AS DECEMBER 1977 AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION WAS ACTUALLY UNDERTAKEN AT ONE POINT BUT CALLED OFF BECAUSE OF TOO MUCH PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE. GIVEN THE TIME NEEDED TO POSITION ITS FORCES PRIOR TO THE ATTACK, IT APPEARS THAT THE DECISION TO GO AHEAD WAS TAKEN NO MORE THAN TWO DAYS AFTER SOUTH AFRICA'S DECISION TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL. THERE IS THUS, A STRONG LIKELIHOOD THAT THE DECISION TO STRIKE WAS A PART OF THE DECISION TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL. THE UK MILITARY ATTACHE IN PRETORIA HAS REACHED A SIMILAR CONCLUSION.

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